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ABSTRACT

Five hundred incoming students attending Mount Saint Vincent University (Nova Scotia) were selected to participate in a study designed to compare the expectations and experiences of traditional students (who entered immediately after high school or transferred from another university or college) and nontraditional students (who entered part-time several years after high school). Student goals, preparation, adjustments, performance, and involvement in university life, as well as first year experiences, were compared with the expectations students held in each of these areas and the impact these variables had on retention. Findings confirmed previous study results in that students' main reasons for attending university are career-related and continue to be so at the end of the first year of study. Neither traditional nor nontraditional students believed that "learning how to think and to study" was the most important reason for attending university. Both types of students felt they were prepared for university study; a belief found to be wrong since both groups had verbal, writing, and time management problems. Also, both groups were found to have unrealistic expectations about their anticipated level of achievement. Results indicated that a combination of unrealistic expectations, non-involvement, and poor performance during the first year of study are major determinants of student attrition. Contains 25 references. (GLR)

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**REALITY versus EXPECTATIONS:
DO THE EXPECTATIONS OF NEW STUDENTS
CORRESPOND WITH THEIR ACTUAL EXPERIENCE**

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Jean Endo
Chair and Editor
Forum Publications Editorial
Advisory Committee

ABSTRACT

Research has shown that student populations on university campuses have changed dramatically. No longer are students coming just from high school, but a growing proportion are pursuing education on a part-time basis after spending time away from the learning environment either at home or in the work force. This changing nontraditional pattern of enrollment brings with it a student population with perceptions, expectations and needs that are different from those attending university through more traditional channels. This study investigated the problem of students' expectations versus what they actually experienced and identified ways that may enable universities to identify the specific educational interests, needs and expectations of its diverse student populations.

**REALITY versus EXPECTATIONS:
DO THE EXPECTATIONS OF NEW STUDENTS
CORRESPOND WITH THEIR ACTUAL EXPERIENCE**

University student populations have changed dramatically in the past two decades. Belanger and Omiecinski (1985) reported that university part-time enrollments increased almost 300% between 1965 and 1985; whereas full-time enrollment increased only 170% during the same period. Campbell (1984) reported a growing proportion of students pursuing their education through non-traditional methods such as studying on a part-time basis and taking non-credit courses. Also, more adult students (over the age of 24 years) and women are entering university (Meiland, Gurin & Kush, 1986).

"The single most dramatic change in Canada in the last decade or so is the increase in the number and proportion of women in the student population ... In the decade from 1976-77 to 1986-87, 75.1% of the growth in the total enrollments (all degree levels, both full-time and part-time) in Canadian universities was due to the increase in the enrollments of women students ". (Selleck and Breslauer, 1989: p.2)

Bertrand (1982) actually predicted that nontraditional students would someday become the majority within universities. Thus, Campbell (1984) advises universities may need to refocus policy-making to include the needs of this emerging majority - nontraditional adult learners.

To better understand attrition, researchers have examined the question of why students seek a university education. Studies have found that the major reasons, for both traditional and nontraditional students, are career-related (Lokitz & Sprandal, 1976; Levine, 1981; Holdaway & Kelloway, 1987; Sewall, 1984). Although the reasons for seeking a university education may be the same for both groups, their actual experiences as students may be quite different.

For traditional students, entering college is a central developmental task. They are seeking to establish identity and autonomy by means of the college experience. Nontraditional students, on the other hand, have established their identities, but may have their identities questioned by the transition to college life (Douvan, 1981). Warchal and Southern (1986) reported that adult students with their realistic perceptions of the world of work, return to university with a sense of urgency to apply skills they intend to develop. "The older adult students are very pragmatic. They want to take home some tangible benefits for their efforts and sacrifices" (p. 43).

Lokitz et. al. (1976) found that traditional students tend to have a preoccupation with academic competence. The desire for high grades predominated as students expected to do as well, if not better, than they had in high school. High grades were needed for well-paying jobs and admission to graduate schools. Optimism about personal goals and expectations prevailed. In the eighties, freshmen were found to be materialistic (Evangelauf, 1984) and believed that being well-off was very important. Hence the competition continued for higher grades as the more academically-prepared students sought after fewer and fewer well-paying jobs.

Studies show that unrealistic expectations result from being inadequately prepared for university life (Palladino and Tryson, 1978; Sagaria, 1980; Moore, Higginson & White, 1981; Holdaway & Kelloway, 1987). Entering students did not feel prepared for college and indeed they were not (Kopelik & Devito 1986; Sagaria, 1980; Moore et. al. 1981; Levine, 1981). Students were found to be less academically prepared than their predecessors. In the U.S., SAT scores declined remarkably and one-quarter of the students

stated they needed remedial instruction in reading, writing and mathematics. Scherer (1982) found that traditional students had insufficient reading and writing skills. Being unprepared has resulted in some students, particularly those coming from high school, being unrealistic in terms of their goals and what they expect to experience. Thus, freshmen students have been found to have naive expectations about the goals and functions of university (King and Walsh, 1972; Hemelstein, 1983; Holdaway & Kelloway, 1987). Baker (1985) referred to these naive expectations as the "Freshman Myth".

Unfortunately, most of the research on student expectations and experiences has focused on students coming directly from high school and has neglected to examine these relationships for students following a nontraditional pattern of enrollment. Nontraditional patterns of enrollment include students who are entering university after having spent time in the labour force or at home raising a family. These students bring with them different life experiences than the traditional students entering university directly from high school or from a community college. Since these students come with vastly different life experiences, it is important not to assume that their expectations and experiences in university will be similar. Thus, universities need to understand and balance the distinct needs of each group since, as Tinto (1975: p. 96) theorized,

"Given individual characteristics, prior experiences and commitments, it is the individual's integration into the academic and social systems of the college that most directly relates to his continuance in that college. Given prior levels of goal and institutional commitment, it is the person's normative and structural integration into the academic and social system that lead to new levels of commitment. Other things being equal, the higher the degree of integration into the college system, the greater will be his/her commitment to the specific institution".

Tinto's theory has been corroborated by many researchers in their studies on student persistence and retention. If students are made to feel more in tune with academic expectations (Moore, Higginson & White, 1981; Schmidt & Sedlacek, 1972; Baker & Siryk, 1980) as well as at home in the social environment (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977), they may also feel more hopeful about persisting at the university until graduation. Thus, by identifying and resolving specific problem areas encountered by freshman students, universities can attempt to reduce attrition rates for first year students.

We believe that given the changing demographics of university student populations, it is essential for universities to know if nontraditional students have the same expectations of, preparation for, and experience with, university education as their traditional counterparts. Thus, this study has attempted to compare the expectations and experiences of traditional and nontraditional students. We have examined how these groups differ in terms of their goals, preparation, adjustments, performance and involvement in university life. We have also examined how first year experiences compare with expectations in each of these areas. The impact these variables have on retention was also investigated.

METHOD

Subjects

Five hundred "new" students, who were admitted to Mount Saint Vincent University during the fall of 1987, were selected to participate in this study. Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU) is a small, urban, Canadian

university of approximately 4,000 students. MSVU's student population is 96% undergraduate, 84% female and, roughly 45% study part-time.

Using stratified random sampling, 500 participants from an entering class of 822 were selected to participate in this study. In selecting the sample, the entering class was divided into groups according to the students' 'basis of admission' to the university. Identifiable groups within the population included students coming directly from high school (56%), mature students (13%) and students transferring from another university or college (31%). This distribution of students within the population, was preserved in the sample.

Procedure

A questionnaire, derived partially from the Holdaway and Kelloway (1987) study, was designed to examine students' expectations of university. This questionnaire was mailed to participants in early August 1987, prior to their arrival on campus. Those who had not returned their questionnaire within two weeks, were sent a reminder notice and a second copy of the questionnaire in mid-August. Only questionnaires received prior to the commencement of September registration were included in the study.

All 324 participants who returned the first questionnaire (prior to the commencement of registration) were sent a follow-up survey in April 1988, at the conclusion of their first year of studies. Reminder notices were sent three weeks after the first mailing.

Analysis

Expectations and experiences with regard to grades, preparation, adjustment and involvement were measured using Likert-type scales. In each case, the scale ranged from 1 to 5 (with 1 being a low rating and 5 being very high.)

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to assess significant differences between groups on each variable. The F-max test was used to test for homogeneity of variance. For students completing both questionnaires, Student's t test was used to identify significant change over time within groups.

Performance was dealt with differently. Individuals were asked to chose the category which best represented their expected level of achievement. These expectations were then checked, using student identification numbers, against actual performance obtained from the University's Student Information System.

RESULTS

Sixty-five percent (324) of those surveyed returned their questionnaire. In order to determine whether respondents were traditional or nontraditional students, individuals had been asked to select the category which best described their activities during the previous year. Results indicated that 74% of respondents were traditional students (high school, transfer students) while the remaining 26% were nontraditional (labour force, managing a household).

Of the three hundred and twenty-four individuals who participated in Phase 1 (expectations) of this study, 253 (78%) also participated in Phase 2 (first year experience). Traditional students continued to comprise 74% of the Phase 2 respondents.

Goals

Results showed that, in keeping with the literature, career related goals were very important to both groups (Table 1). The F values listed for Time 1 show that traditional students rated the goals "to get a job", "to meet new people" and, "to avoid unemployment", significantly higher than their non-traditional counterparts.

TABLE I
GOALS

	Time 1			Time 2		
	T $\bar{x}$	NT $\bar{x}$	F	T $\bar{x}$	NT $\bar{x}$	F
To get a job ¹	4.8	4.3	29.14** ¹	4.7	4.1	29.41** ¹
Learn specific topic	4.4	4.3	1.10	4.0	4.0	.03
Well-paying job	4.2	4.1	.10	4.3	3.8	11.97** ¹
General education	3.8	3.7	.31	3.9	3.8	.29
Learn to think & study	4.1	3.8	5.29	3.9	3.8	.39
Meet new people	3.9	3.3	21.66**	3.8	3.0	18.55**
Avoid unemployment	3.8	3.4	18.19**	4.0	2.7	36.84**
Further education	3.6	3.6	1.67	3.5	3.4	.06
Please parents & family	2.3	1.8	10.36	2.3	1.7	12.30**

¹ Variable did not meet assumption of homogeneity of variance.

** p < .01.

T=Traditional NT=Nontraditional

Both traditional and nontraditional students continued to place great emphasis on career-related goals at the end of their first year. F values

for Time 2 show that traditional students continued to rate "to get a job", "to meet new people" and "to avoid unemployment" significantly higher than the nontraditional student. They also placed significantly more importance on "getting a well paying job", and "pleasing family/parents" than their nontraditional counterparts.

Examining only those individuals who had completed both questionnaires (Table 2) indicate that traditional students felt "to learn about specific topics", although still important, was significantly less important than they had originally expected.

TABLE 2
STUDENT'S t TEST RESULTS: GOALS

	Traditional			Nontraditional		
	T1 $\bar{x}$	T2 $\bar{x}$	t	T1 $\bar{x}$	T2 $\bar{x}$	t
To get a job	4.8	4.7	1.71	4.1	4.1	0.00
Learn specific topic	4.3	4.0	3.71**	4.4	4.0	2.26
Well-paying job	4.2	4.3	-1.73	4.1	3.9	1.07
General education	3.7	3.8	-0.64	3.7	3.9	-0.50
Learn think & study	3.8	3.8	-0.67	4.0	3.9	1.07
Meet new people	3.9	3.8	1.83	3.2	3.1	0.91
Avoid unemployment	3.8	4.0	-1.78	2.8	2.7	0.42
Further education	3.5	3.5	0.11	3.5	3.4	0.59
Please parents/family	2.3	2.3	0.34	1.9	1.7	1.73

** p < .01

T1=Expectations T2=Experience

Preparation

Both traditional and non-traditional students expected to be well prepared for reading and listening and less prepared for writing exams and using the library (Table 3). Looking at the differences between the

expectations of these groups (F), traditional students felt significantly better prepared than non-traditional students for writing exams.

TABLE 3
PREPARATION

	TIME 1			TIME 2		
	T x	NT x	F	T x	NT x	F
Reading	4.3	4.1	2.87	4.2	4.0	4.32
Listening	4.1	4.1	.13	4.2	3.8	10.3 ¹
Taking Notes	3.7	3.5	3.75	3.8	3.5	3.69
Writing exams	3.4	3.0	13.78**	3.7	3.0	22.80**
Writing essays/papers	3.5	3.1	8.65 ¹	3.2	2.8	8.78
Study Skills	3.5	3.3	2.31	3.4	3.2	2.20
Speaking Skills	3.4	3.4	.10	3.4	3.3	.52
Library Skills	3.3	3.0	6.13	3.2	2.5	14.11**
Budgeting Time	3.5	3.5	.01	3.5	3.2	4.31
Self Discipline	3.9	3.8	.92	3.7	3.4	1.43

¹ Variable did not meet assumption of homogeneity of variance.

** p < .01

T=Traditional NT=Nontraditional

On follow-up both groups continued to feel that they had been well prepared for reading and listening and less prepared for using the library. The two groups differed in that traditional students continued to feel significantly better prepared for writing exams and using the library than the nontraditional students.

Table 4 shows that traditional students felt significantly less prepared than expected for "writing essays/papers", "using the library", "budgeting time" and in areas of "self discipline". They felt significantly better prepared for "writing exams" than they had anticipated. Nontraditional students, on the other hand, were as prepared as expected in all areas except for "using the library". Here, they were significantly less prepared than anticipated.

TABLE 4
STUDENT'S t TEST RESULTS: PREPARATION

	Traditional			Nontraditional		
	T1 $\bar{x}$	T2 $\bar{x}$	t	T1 $\bar{x}$	T2 $\bar{x}$	t
Reading	4.4	4.2	1.63	4.0	4.0	.00
Listening	4.2	4.2	-0.31	4.0	3.8	1.47
Taking Notes	3.7	3.8	-1.68	3.5	3.5	-0.22
Writing Exams	3.4	3.7	-3.74**	3.0	3.0	-0.46
Writing essays/papers	3.5	3.3	2.80**	3.0	2.8	1.87
Study skills	3.5	3.4	0.79	3.4	3.1	1.29
Speaking skills	3.5	3.4	1.07	3.3	3.3	0.40
Library skills	3.4	3.2	2.85**	3.0	2.5	3.09**
Budgeting time	3.5	3.2	4.23**	3.6	3.5	0.78
Self discipline	3.8	3.5	3.78**	4.0	3.7	1.85

** p < .01

T1=Expectations T2=Experience

Adjustments

Both traditional and nontraditional students anticipated having to make the greatest adjustment to both the "amount" and "difficulty of the work" (Table 5). The groups differed significantly regarding their anticipated adjustment to many aspects of university life. Traditional students believed that attending university would require a greater number of adjustments than did their nontraditional counterparts.

TABLE 5
ADJUSTMENT

	Time 1			Time 2		
	T $\bar{x}$	NT $\bar{x}$	F	T $\bar{x}$	NT $\bar{x}$	F
Amt.of work	3.2	3.2	.13	3.4	3.2	.79
Registration	3.6	2.8	21.95**	3.7	3.4	3.76
Diff.of work	3.2	3.1	2.21	3.1	2.7	5.68
Instruction Methods	3.1	2.8	5.52	2.8	2.7	.36
Admin. Procedures	3.0	2.5	15.17**	3.1	2.6	9.28
Trans/Parking	2.5	2.1	4.22	2.8	2.6	.93
Away from home	2.3	1.3	33.06** ¹	2.3	1.6	14.84**

Table 5 continued...

	Time 1			Time 2		
	T $\bar{x}$	NT $\bar{x}$	F F	T $\bar{x}$	NT $\bar{x}$	F F
Using Library	2.6	2.6	.06	2.8	2.7	.34
Grading System	2.8	2.4	6.36	2.3	2.3	.01
University Size	2.5	2.1	19.55**	2.0	1.7	5.67
Class Sizes	2.8	2.2	15.78**	2.0	1.8	2.99
Relation to Staff and Faculty	2.7	2.0	24.37**	2.6	2.1	6.98
Lack of money	3.0	2.7	2.75	3.1	2.8	2.12
Study Facilities	2.5	2.3	3.72	2.6	2.3	4.00
Making friends	2.4	1.9	13.48**	2.1	1.6	9.64
Lack of Supervision	2.0	1.4	21.40** ¹	1.8	1.3	12.87** ¹
Working With Others	1.9	1.7	5.54	1.9	1.7	1.65

¹ Variable did not meet the assumption of homogeneity of variance.

** P < .01

T=Traditional NT=Nontraditional

On follow-up, both traditional and non-traditional students felt they had made their greatest adjustments to the "amount of work" and to "registration procedures". The areas in which the two groups differed with respect to actual adjustments narrowed considerably. Traditional students rated "moving away from home" and "lack of supervision" significantly higher than did non-traditional students. All other areas were equal.

Looking at Student's t results (Table 6) one can see that traditional students had significantly less difficulty than anticipated adjusting to university attendance. Adjusting to "methods of instruction", "grading system", "size of university", and "size of classes" were all easier than expected. No area required greater adjustment than anticipated. Nontraditional students had significantly less difficulty adjusting to the "difficulty of the work" and significantly greater difficulty adjusting to "registration procedures" and "transportation/parking".

TABLE 6
STUDENT'S t TEST RESULTS: ADJUSTMENT

	Traditional			Nontraditional		
	T1 $\bar{x}$	T2 $\bar{x}$	t	T1 $\bar{x}$	T2 $\bar{x}$	t
Amount of work	3.2	3.2	-0.06	3.3	3.4	-0.58
Registration	3.6	3.7	-1.01	2.8	3.4	-3.76**
Difficulty of work	3.2	3.1	2.09	3.1	2.7	2.76**
Instruction Methods	3.1	2.8	4.19**	2.8	2.7	0.54
Admin. procedures	3.0	3.1	-1.01	2.5	2.6	-1.20
Trans/Parking	2.5	2.6	-0.78	2.1	2.8	-2.68**
Away from home	2.3	2.4	-0.25	1.4	1.6	-1.35
Using library	2.5	2.7	-1.69	2.6	2.8	-0.90
Grading system	2.8	2.3	5.24**	2.3	2.3	0.18
University size	2.7	2.0	7.09**	2.0	1.7	2.19
Class sizes	2.8	2.0	7.56**	2.1	1.8	1.73
Relation to staff and faculty	2.7	2.6	0.44	2.0	2.1	-1.33
Lack of money	3.0	3.1	-1.72	2.8	2.8	-0.33
Study facilities	2.4	2.6	-1.86	2.3	2.3	0.17
Making friends	2.3	2.1	2.14	1.8	1.6	1.47
Lack of supervision	2.0	1.8	1.97	1.4	1.3	0.66
Working with others	2.0	1.9	0.18	1.7	1.7	-0.43

** p < .01

T1=Expectations T2=Experience

Performance

With regard to performance, the expectations of both traditional and non-traditional students were similar (Table 7). Eighty-three percent of traditional students and 91% of nontraditional students anticipated a grade point average between 70% and 89% with the majority in both groups (56% and 63% respectively) expecting grade point averages at the 70th percentile.

Both groups over-estimated their expected grade point averages and performed below estimations. Seventy percent of the traditional group and 58% of the nontraditional group over-estimated their grade point averages. Only 4% of the traditional students underestimated their level of achievement

compared to 17% for nontraditional students. Although unrealistic in their expectations, the nontraditional group was slightly more cautious in their predictions of achievement as compared to the traditional group.

TABLE 7
PERFORMANCE

GPA	Traditional				Non-Traditional			
	Antic.		Actual		Antic.		Actual	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
0-49	0	0	40	17%	0	0	10	12%
50-59	0	0	24	10%	0	0	6	7%
60-69	32	14%	82	34%	3	4%	14	17%
70-89	195	83%	80	33%	76	90%	44	52%
90-100	8	3%	2	.8%	5	6%	4	5%
Withdrawal	0	0	11	5%	0	0	6	7%

	TRADITIONAL		NON-TRADITIONAL	
OVER-ESTIMATED	164	(70%)	49	(58%)
UNDER-ESTIMATED	9	(4%)	14	(17%)
ACCURATE ASSESSMENT	62	(26%)	21	(25%)
AVERAGE GRADE	61.8		67.7	(F=5.91)

While failure rates for the two groups were similar, when taken together these numbers represent a 15% failure rate overall. An additional 5% withdrew during the 1987/88 academic year.

Overall, nontraditional students performed slightly better than their traditional counterparts.

Involvement

Table 8 shows that neither group expected to be overly involved in student life on campus. Areas in which traditional students did expect to be more involved than the nontraditional student included athletics and student clubs.

TABLE 8
INVOLVEMENT

	Time 1			Time 2		
	T x	NT x	F	T x	NT x	F
Athletics	2.4	1.8	21.72**	1.6	1.3	5.07
Academic/Cultural	2.9	2.8	1.25	1.7	1.7	.00
Student Clubs	3.0	2.0	50.14**	1.6	1.4	1.68
Student Government	2.1	1.8	5.94	1.2	1.2	.02

** p < .01

T=Traditional NT=Nontraditional

On follow-up, both groups were less involved than anticipated and no significant differences remained between the groups.

Both groups rated their level of involvement significantly lower on follow-up in comparison to expectations (Table 9).

TABLE 9
STUDENT'S t TEST RESULTS: INVOLVEMENT

	Traditional			Nontraditional		
	T1 x	T2 x	t	T1 x	T2 x	t
Athletics	2.4	1.6	10.02**	1.8	1.3	4.73**
Academic/Cultural	2.9	1.7	14.22**	2.8	1.7	7.02**
Student clubs	3.0	1.6	15.70**	2.1	1.4	4.24**
Student government	2.2	1.3	11.23**	1.9	1.2	4.14**

** p < .01

T1=Expectations T2=Experience

General

When asked specific questions about their first years experience ie. "how well have you done", "how interesting were your studies" etc., it was found that non-traditional students felt they were doing better, found their studies more interesting, received greater enjoyment out of attending

university and felt more satisfied with their university experience than did the traditional students (Table 10).

TABLE 10
OVERALL

	$\frac{T}{\bar{x}}$	$\frac{NT}{\bar{x}}$	F
Doing as well as expected	2.9	4.2	6.57**
Interest of Studies	3.5	4.2	26.47**
Enjoy Attending	3.3	4.2	26.11** ¹
Satisfied with Experience	3.5	4.5	9.55** ¹
Working as hard as expected	3.3	3.4	.55

¹ Variable did not meet the assumption of Homogeneity of Variance.

** p < .01.

T=Traditional NT=Nontraditional

DISCUSSION

Although both groups started university with varying degrees of similarity - with respect to their level of preparation, anticipated adjustment required in university study and, expected performance - both groups were unrealistic when estimating how well they would actually do. Overall, traditional students had greater optimism than the more cautious nontraditional student. Nonetheless both groups fell prey to the "freshman myth".

The results of this study confirm the findings of several earlier studies which showed that students' main reasons for attending university are career-related. Furthermore, career-related goals continued to be important at the end of the first year of study. For traditional students, meeting new people was an important factor in their decision to attend university which concurs with previous research and re-emphasizes the need for "traditional"

freshmen to establish their identity during their first year on campus. Contrary to what education officials may believe, neither traditional nor nontraditional students believed that "learning how to think and to study" was the most important reason for attending university.

Both traditional and nontraditional students believed they had been well prepared for university study. Unfortunately, in actuality neither group was as well prepared as originally anticipated. In keeping with Scherer's (1982) findings, both groups had difficulty with writing skills. Other problem areas included time management and verbal skills. Contrary to Scherer's findings, reading skills were not a problem area.

Both groups agreed that the "amount of work" and the "registration procedures" were the two areas requiring the greatest adjustment. Non-academic concerns were important to both groups, however, they were actually quite different. Moving away from home and lack of supervision required greater adjustment on the part of traditional students while the non-traditional students, who presumably had considerable experience in these areas, were more concerned with problems of transportation and parking.

With respect to performance, the findings support the research reported earlier. Unrealistic expectations result from being inadequately prepared. Both groups overestimated their level of preparation and were, therefore, overconfident in predicting their academic achievement. As one would expect, no one anticipated failing. Both groups wanted their university experience to be successful and this resulted in exaggerated outcomes. Traditional students expected to do as well, or better, than they had done in high school. Nontraditional students were also unrealistic about their expected level of achievement.

While the anticipated level of involvement was minimal for both groups, their actual level of involvement was even lower than expected. If, according to Tinto, students need to feel integrated and involved in campus life in order to be persistent in their studies and to feel committed to the institution, then it comes as no surprise that with minimal involvement and a combined rate of failure/withdrawal of 20% in year 1, the actual retention rate going into year two was only 63 percent.

Thus, it appears that a combination of unrealistic expectations, non-involvement and, poor performance during the first year of study are major determinants of student attrition - for both traditional and nontraditional students.

Conclusions

If the theory about integration and persistence is valid, universities need to explore ways of involving students more in the life and environment of the institution. Efforts in this regard must be directed not only to the traditional freshman student but also to the growing population of nontraditional freshman.

The results of this study indicate that although the expectations of both groups are quite similar, they have distinct needs and concerns. Bearing this in mind, universities need to develop legitimate interest in, and understanding of, the personal and environmental concerns of both groups. They must learn how to balance the needs of traditional students with those of nontraditional students to ensure that the services required by one group do not come at the expense of the other. In times of fiscal restraint this balancing act becomes increasingly difficult.

As students make greater and greater sacrifices (both personal and financial) to pursue a higher education, the pressure increases on universities to assist these students with achieving their goals. Unfortunately, when students have faulty perceptions with respect to their preparation for university study and unrealistic expectations for their level of performance, the university's job becomes more challenging. Since it has been shown that student success correlates highly with persistence, it is little wonder that 30%, and possibly as high as 50%, of first year students drop out of university (Terenzini, 1987).

In an effort to try and counteract these high levels of attrition, universities need to integrate students into the university environment not only with respect to social and athletic participation but also in terms of academic performance. Based on these results, we recommend that universities consider refocussing their first year orientation programs and support services placing greater emphasis on academic integration. There is no substitute for sound academic advising combined with a first year emphasis on study skills and time management. Students must also be provided with sufficient information regarding the complexities of university study, i.e. the preparation required and the amount of work involved. In addition, nontraditional students require assistance with child care, housing and, transportation. Issues of social involvement may best be left for subsequent years since freshman students do not anticipate high levels of involvement during their first year.

Universities need to spend as much time, energy and money on retaining the students they have as they spend on recruiting new students. Then, maybe, we will begin to see a drop in first year attrition rates.

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